



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT ST. PATRICK'S DAY  
BREAKFAST AT GRACIE MANSION**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** All right. We've got a lively crowd this morning! Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Happy St. Patrick's Day to all.

[Applause]

I want to thank you all for being here bright and early. I want to thank Brian O'Dwyer who does an extraordinary job at everything. I want you to know, Brian is a great leader of the Irish American community here in this city and nationally, and he also makes sure to help us every year to put together this breakfast. So his firm is one of the sponsors of the breakfast – the firm that has one of the quintessential examples of New York City culture – the firm O'Dwyer and Bernstein – so –

[Laughter]

– so, I want to thank you, Brian, for your leadership. I want to thank you for your leadership of the Emerald Isle Immigration Center, which means so much to the community of this city. We had a great delegation here from the Irish government. They had to go ahead to the mass, but I want to thank them anyway – Heather Humphries, who is the Minister for Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht.

**Unknown:** You said it [inaudible].

**Mayor:** Did I say it right?

[Applause]

Those Gaelic lessons are paying off.

[Laughter]

I also want to thank a great friend, Barbara Jones, the Consul General of Ireland, who does so much for this city.

[Applause]

So many members of the administration wanted to be here – Chirlane and I had to, like, say to people – hey, because this is one of the special events of the year, if you're good, you get to go to the St. Patrick's Breakfast. So I'm going to name the folks who are here from the administration, but I want to say at the outset – Chirlane and I believe this is the people's house.

We believe that the whole idea of Gracie Mansion, first occupied by the greatest mayor we've ever had, Fiorello La Guardia, was that – it was a gathering place for all of us – and today epitomizes that notion. If you are Irish,

you are blessed today and everyday. If you don't happen to be Irish, you're here to celebrate and feel Irish and participate in our love for Irish heritage and culture today. But it's a place for everyone, so I want to offer you our deepest welcome.

And I want to tell you – again, so many members of the administration wanted to be here. Chief of the NYPD – Chief of Department Jimmy O'Neill – let's thank him for all he does.

[Applause]

Our fire commissioner, Dan Nigro – let's thank him.

[Applause]

Buildings Commissioner Rick Chandler.

[Applause]

Community Affairs Commissioner Marco Carrion, and our international affairs commissioner, Penny Abeywardena – we thank them all for all they do.

[Applause]

Also, a man who represents a great community in this city and has done so much for the Irish community and every community – Council Member Danny Dromm – we thank you for being here.

[Applause]

Now, I want to acknowledge someone who is not here because we lost him, and he epitomizes so much of the Irish contribution to this country – Staff Sergeant Liam Flynn of Queens, originally of County Kildare. He joined the marines. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He won a bronze star for valor and a number of other medals. But we lost him – he was among the seven marines and four crewmembers who perished recently in the Black Hawk helicopter crash off of Florida. He leaves behind his wife, his daughter, his parents, and nine siblings – a tremendous loss for this city and this country. Could we please observe a moment of silence in honor of Liam Flynn?

[Moment of Silence]

Thank you. So this day – this day we feel so deeply a day of profound celebration. And it celebrates, for us, what the Irish have done for this city and for this country. It celebrates the immigrant experience. It means so much to us – it's a touchstone for New York. And a great writer, from a neighborhood that we love deeply – Park Slope, Brooklyn – he summed it up nicely. He said, "New York City is an alloy, forged from many metals into something distinct and powerful and special." That writer happens to be on stage with us – Pete Hamill – and I am so proud to welcome him.

[Applause]

[Cheers]

**Pete Hamill:** Hello, hello, hello.

**Mayor:** I want to welcome – I want to welcome his brother Dennis and the entire Hamill family that's here today.

[Applause]

Now, Pete – Pete was right. New York City has a distinct character and it is shaped substantially by an emerald thread that runs through that tapestry of New York.

We're a city of immigrants – one in three New Yorkers today an immigrant, born elsewhere and bringing who they are here. And the Irish were the first great wave. They created the template. They created the pathway for so many others.

Don't forget for a moment that the Irish faced immense discrimination and prejudice – not just in the first years when they came in large numbers to this country, but over and over again. But they made New York City stronger. They made the nation stronger. They brought so much of the character that now we think of as the American way, and one thing I think is true objectively – the Irish people have always longed for freedom. They've always longed for justice. President Kennedy said powerfully, "They left behind" – In Ireland, "They left behind hearts and fields and a nation yearning to be free."

That story – the Irish experience in this country – that story is reflected deeply by the Hamill family – parents from Belfast, fleeing violence and discrimination. They – Dennis' and Pete's parents met here. They married. They raised seven kids in Brooklyn. Their mother Anne taught them freedom is more important than money, and you must never be a bigot – powerful, simple words to live by. Pete, as we can see from his writings, he listened to her – he listened to all the voices of this city.

His ideas and his vision are Irish to the core, but also quintessentially New York. And no one expresses New York's special quality and the beauty of our diversity better. Let me just read a brief passage from Pete's book, *Downtown: My Manhattan*: "Look across the water at the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island – the place to which so many of the New York tribe came in order to truly live. Learn the tale of our tribe, because it's your tribe too, no matter where you were born." I think those words epitomize what we feel as New Yorkers and our values.

The Irish community is so strong and the Irish presence is growing – nearly 15,000 New Yorkers today born in Ireland – from Woodlawn in the Bronx to Woodside in Queens, New York City is home to over 800,000 people of Irish decent and the highest concentration anywhere in the United States of America, for which we are proud.

So we honor that heritage with so many celebrations – and this is the moment where I do a little bit of product placement to thank our other sponsors. I hope you've been able to eat some of the wonderful food that's been passed around today. Let's thank those who brought us the soda bread and the corned beef hash – the Butcher's Block in Sunnyside –

[Applause]

Rosie O'Grady's on Seventh Avenue –

[Applause]

– not that any of you have ever been there – and An Beal Bocht in the Bronx – An Beal Bocht Café.

[Applause]

We honor the community by remembering to continue to reach out and support the new immigrants. That's why this city has provided \$30 million to the Irish Arts Center to continue the heritage.

[Applause]

We honor the Irish tradition by providing for people in need. That's why I had the honor of standing with Cardinal Dolan a few months ago and breaking ground on an affordable senior housing complex in the Bronx.

[Applause]

We honor the Irish heritage when we uplift all immigrants, which is why New York City now has an ID card for all that hundreds of thousands of people are benefitting from.

[Applause]

We honor the heritage when we make sure that the next generation of immigrants has opportunity. That's why we're fighting to protect the executive action on immigrant reform – so the almost 12 million people here can be treated with decency.

[Applause]

And we honor the Irish heritage in America by remembering what it did to our thinking, what it did to the way we approach this society. This nation, this city in particular, forged in our values so deeply by leadership of Irish Americans the progressive tradition that I subscribe to so deeply. It would be impossible to even talk about if it weren't for Al Smith, who was the originator in so many ways.

[Applause]

It would be impossible to imagine where we are today if it weren't for John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy and Teddy Kennedy, who helped change the face of this nation.

[Applause]

And if I may be a little parochial, New York City would not be as good and open a progressive place if it hadn't been for Paul O'Dwyer.

[Applause]

So, everything that we are doing lives in that tradition – whether it's the work on behalf of immigrants, whether it's living wage or paid sick leave or affordable housing or pre-k for all – it all stems from a traditional, a progressive tradition so richly Irish in its origin.

There's an old Irish saying: "Under the shelter of each other, people survive."

[Applause]

We celebrate all that and we celebrate St. Patrick's Day with joy. And now, it's my honor to turn to the man of the hour. Well, it is said that Ireland is an island of poets, and our city is a city of islands, and we are lucky to have a great Irish poet – an Irish American poet, in effect – amongst us. His poetry – his writing, if you will, has been seen in books, in magazines, even in the occasional tabloid newspaper. [Laughs]. He's told the story of our times in clear and powerful prose that packs a Brooklyn punch, and everyone who read over the years the words of Pete Hamill couldn't help but be moved by it.

And, Pete, I give you tremendous credit for that. It's a busy world and it's a complicated world. Some people touch our hearts. Some people make us pay attention. Some people make us think. Some people make us feel more. You've done that for years and years. You've made us feel something bigger and better – and that is a blessing for New York City and it has meant so much for us.

And so, in honor of the extraordinary achievements of Pete Hamill, aided, I must say, by the entire Hamill family – there's another saying – it takes a village, right? – it is my honor as mayor of this city to proclaim today, Tuesday March 17, 2015, in the city of New York, Pete Hamill Day.

[Applause]

Pete, the floor is yours.

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